DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 797 CE 027 450

AUTHOR Dustrager, Terry; and Others
TITLE A National Perspective on School Psychology: Changes in Service Delivery.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association (104th, Toronto, Canada, August 9-13, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Children; *Counseling Services; Counselors; *Delivery Systems; Elementary Secondary Education; *Innovation; Psychological Evaluation; *Pupil Personnel Services; Pupil Personnel Workers; *School Psychologists; Student Personnel Workers

ABSTRACT

Given the high priority granted innovative topics in the school psychology literature, one might question the degree to which practitioners implement these innovations. This paper examines this question regarding innovation, change, and service delivery. Data were drawn from a nationwide longitudinal survey, in which a random sampling of 1000 school psychologists, beginning in 1992, responded to surveys. The surveys included measures of attitudes and trends in the movement toward professional reform. Implementation of reform was compared by geographic location. Results revealed a slow transition toward more innovative practices. Psychological assessment remained the most frequent professional activity despite respondents' stated ideal to increase consultation and direct intervention. The persistent emphasis on innovation was not reflected in service delivery. Concerning regional differences, respondents from the West and West Central regions of the areas surveyed reported significantly more actual time in intervention than did those from the Southeast and North Central regions. The time spent in intervention by those in the Northeast ranked between the two extremes. Furthermore, four areas currently receiving attention in the literature--consultation, individual counseling, classroom observation, and behavior analysis--were ranked high among the professional activities in which school psychologists engaged most frequently. (Author)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 408 597



# A Nineties Perspective on School Psychology: Changes in Service Delivery

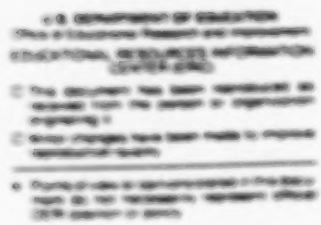
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

T. Bontrager

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Terry Bontrager, Felicia L. Wilczenski, Arlene F. Bosco, and J. Erin Barry

Rhode Island College



Terry Bontrager, Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology; Felicia L. Wilczenski, Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology; Arlene F. Bosco, Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology; and J. Erin Barry Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology.

This report is one of several based on the database from a five-year longitudinal study. This paper accompanied a poster session at the 1996 meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Terry Bontrager, who is now at Pupil Personnel Services, New Bedford Public Schools, 455 County Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts 02740.

97450



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Abstract

This paper assesses practitioners' implementation of innovation and change in service delivery, a common topic in recent school psychology literature. Data were drawn from a nationwide longitudinal survey, a random sampling of 1000 school psychologists whose responses have been solicited annually since 1981. These surveys include measures of attitudes and trends in the movement toward professional reform. Results reveal a slow transition toward more innovative practices. Assessment remains the most frequent professional activity despite respondents' stated ideal to increase consultation and direct intervention. Implementation of reform was compared by geographic location. Respondents from the West and West Central regions reported significantly more actual time in intervention than did those from the Southeast and North Central regions; Northeastern respondents ranked time in intervention between the two extremes.




BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## School Psychology Practice in an Era of Educational Reform

In contrast to the traditional role that school psychologists have taken as testers and gatekeepers for special education, the profession, as reflected in its literature (e.g., Ysseldyke & Marston, 1990), has had an increasing emphasis on innovation and change. In the 1995 calendar year School Psychology Review (National Association of School Psychologists) and School Psychology Quarterly (Division of School Psychology, American Psychological Association), journals of two national professional organizations for school psychologists, each published articles on school reform, early interventions, alternative assessment, home/school collaboration, preventive programs, technology, and diverse student populations. Reasons for the increased interest in innovation and change are probably varied. These may include the nationally recognized need for reform within the entire field of education as well as the increased diversity within the populations served by school psychologists--populations whose needs have not been adequately addressed by traditional psychology practice. Interest in innovation may also be the result of maturation of the profession with an accompanying desire to carve out a larger role for itself.

Given the high priority currently granted innovative topics in the school psychology literature, one might reasonably



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

question the degree of practitioners' implementation of those same ideas. This paper addresses that question. It is based on a nationwide survey of school psychologists whose responses have been solicited annually over a four-year period.

## Method

In 1992, the survey was mailed to a random sampling of 1000 school psychologists who were regular members of the National Association of School Psychologists. Seven hundred twenty usable surveys were returned that year. Follow-up surveys have been conducted each year since then. There were 438 usable surveys in 1993, 298 in 1994, and 193 in 1995. Table 1 illustrates the fact that, despite attrition over the four-year period, the sample has consistently conformed to NASP membership characteristics from April 1992 in terms of gender, regional distribution, degree status, and national certification.

The first survey focused on the personal, educational, and professional backgrounds of school psychologists as well as their present job satisfaction, professional practice, and career paths. While continuing to focus on many of those areas, more recent surveys have also examined attitudes and trends in the movement toward reform in the profession--areas such as the roles and functions of school psychologists as change agents, attitudes toward inclusion, and preparation for working with diverse student populations.

From the 1993 survey, data relating to amounts of time devoted to assessment, consultation, and intervention were



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

further broken down for analysis by geographic region. An analysis of variance followed by a Student-Newman-Keuls procedure was used to determine difference in practice for those regions.

## Results

### 1992 Survey

The 1992 survey asked respondents to rank 15 professional activities--as well as an open-ended "Other" category--according to time investment. Psychological assessment ranked first as the professional activity in which school psychologists engaged most frequently. Consultation with teachers ranked second; consultation with parents tied with administrative/clerical duties for the third rank. Individual counseling was in a four-way tie for the next rank. The three other activities with which it tied were classroom observation and behavior analysis--areas currently receiving increased emphasis in the literature--as well as screening for general education or psychological assessment.

Another item on that same year's survey asked respondents to endorse the frequency with which they engaged in a number of professional activities. Examples of the same are working in regular education classes and discussing results of child studies with other psychologists. The two activities for which at least 50% of the respondents endorsed "often" (the highest option) were improving professional skills, and evaluating children and recommending interventions. The activities for which respondents endorsed "rarely" or "never" (the two lowest options) were developing and/or implementing preventive mental health programs,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

carrying out original research, and becoming involved in the organizational politics of schools.

1993 Survey

Items on the 1993 survey, among other things, juxtaposed the perceived autonomy of the school psychologist with the actual and ideal amounts of time engaged in assessment, consultation, and intervention. Sixty-four percent of the respondents to that survey indicated that they had "a lot" of freedom to decide how to do their work. Another, open-ended question asked respondents to assign a percentage to the amounts of time they actually and ideally would engage in assessment, consultation, and intervention (both direct and indirect). Table 2 shows that only a small number of respondents either desired or estimated that they actually spent more than 50% of their time in each activity. The outstanding exception to this is the category of assessment, the activity in which fully 41% of respondents estimated that they had spent more than half of their time (modal responses were 50% estimated actual time vs. an ideal of 30%). Comparisons of estimated actual time investments with the stated ideal for each activity reveal a desire to decrease time involved in assessment (actual mode, 50%; ideal mode, 30%) and increase time involved in consultation (actual mode, 20%; ideal mode, 30%) and intervention (actual mode, 10%; ideal mode, 30%).

The actual and ideal data for assessment, consultation, and intervention were broken down by geographic region for further analysis. An analysis of variance indicated significant regional

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

differences ($F(4, 396) = 3.62$, $p < .01$). Follow up Student-Newman-Keuls procedures revealed that school psychologists in the West and West Central regions spent statistically significantly more actual time in intervention than did those in the Southeast and North Central regions. School psychologists in the Northeast ranked between those two extremes.

Another area of inquiry for the 1993 survey was how frequently school psychologists check on student progress after placement in special programs. The majority of respondents (56%) indicated that they do so less than 25% of the time.

The 1995 Survey

The majority (70%) of the respondents to the 1995 survey indicated that they had been involved in the development and implementing of innovative programs. They rated their involvement as equal to or greater than that of other school personnel. The innovative programs they developed and implemented concerned primarily collaboration among school personnel (39%) and inclusion (34%).

Most respondents to the 1995 survey did not use innovations in assessment on a regular basis nor had they tried them in the last year. Of the minority who did use them, the assessment innovations that were most often utilized on a regular basis were curriculum-based (21%), performance-based (21%), and portfolio assessment (10%).

In terms of working with diverse populations, the majority of respondents to the 1995 survey indicated that 10% or less of

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the population with which they work was culturally diverse. Those school psychologists rated their own training programs as having provided them satisfactory (49%) or excellent (4%) preparation for work with diverse students. The population with limited English proficiency was the one with which they felt least comfortable working.

## Discussion

Despite a persistent emphasis on innovation and change in the recent school psychology literature, a nation-wide sampling of school psychologists reported practice in the field that bears small resemblance to the renewal called for. Psychological assessment continued to be the professional activity in which school psychologists engaged most frequently. Even in that area, respondents reported little use of innovative assessment practices on a regular basis nor had they experimented with assessment alternatives during the year prior to being asked. Likewise, developing and/or implementing preventive mental health programs received little professional attention. The kinds of innovative programs that received school psychologists' attention for development and implementation often concerned inclusion, a movement externally driven by state and federal mandates and special education reforms.

Comparing responses on the 1993 survey for ideal and actual time spent on assessment reveals that many professionals are spending much more time on assessment than they would ideally--time that they claim would prefer to spend on consultation and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

intervention. Given that in the 1991 survey 65% of respondents rated their supervisors as "fairly well" or "very well" informed about the school psychologists' job, and given the autonomy endorsed on the 1993 survey, it seems strange that school psychologists do not realize their ideal apportionment of duties. This discrepancy may be key to understanding the slow rate of transition to more innovative practices.

On the brighter side, four areas currently receiving attention in the literature--consultation, individual counseling, classroom observation, and behavior analysis--were ranked high among the professional activities in which school psychologists engage most frequently. Another positive sign for change was that when school psychologists became involved in the development and implementation of innovative programs, those programs most often involved collaboration among school personnel. Curriculum-based and performance-based were the assessment innovations in which school psychologists were most involved. Professionals in this field indicated that they were pleased with their level of preparation for working with diverse students.

One of the early lessons in any course on consultation is that systems change slowly. The markers of change included in this series of surveys point out that the profession of school psychology is no exception to that observation. Though we school psychologists may pride ourselves on being agents for change within schools, we as a profession have been slow to make the present transition to more innovative practices.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## References

Diaz, T. D. (1997). Practitioner's guide to dynamic assessment. New York: Guilford.

Reschly, D. J. (1988). Special education reform: School psychology revolution. School Psychology Review, 17, 459-475.

Reschly, D. J., & Wilson, M. S. (1990). Cognitive processing vs. traditional intelligence: Diagnostic utility, intervention utilization, and treatment validity. School Psychology Review, 19, 401-412.

Shinn, M. R. (Ed.). (1989). Curriculum-based measurement: Assessing special children. New York: Guilford.

Yesseldyke, J. E., & Marston, D. (1990). The need of assessment information to plan instructional interventions: A review of the research. In T. B. Gutkin & C. R. Reynolds (Eds.), The handbook of School Psychology. New York: Wiley.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 1

Comparison of NASP Membership and Survey Respondents

| | Sample | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | NASP[a] | | 1992 | | 1993 | | 1994 | | 1995 | |
| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| Gender | | | | | | | | | | |
| Males | 6765 | 32 | 241 | 33 | 145 | 33 | 101 | 34 | 62 | 32 |
| Females | 14603 | 68 | 479 | 67 | 293 | 67 | 197 | 66 | 131 | 68 |
| Regional Distribution | | | | | | | | | | |
| Northeast | 4781 | 30 | 222 | 31 | 142 | 32 | 93 | 31 | 51 | 26 |
| Southeast | 3140 | 20 | 140 | 19 | 83 | 19 | 54 | 18 | 36 | 19 |

(table continues)

| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Central | 3222 | 20 | 153 | 21 | 81 | 19 | 58 | 20 | 42 | 22 |
| West Central | 2004 | 13 | 75 | 10 | 45 | 10 | 33 | 11 | 19 | 10 |
| West | 2615 | 17 | 130 | 18 | 87 | 20 | 60 | 20 | 45 | 23 |
| Degree Status | | | | | | | | | | |
| Masters Specialist | 14008 | 76 | 516 | 72 | 324 | 74 | 220 | 74 | 144 | 75 |
| Doctorate | 4327 | 24 | 204 | 28 | 114 | 26 | 78 | 26 | 49 | 25 |
| National Certification | 17000 | 75[b] | 532 | 74 | 321 | 73 | 223 | 75 | 144 | 75 |

[a] NASP Membership Data--April, 1992

[b] Estimate per NASP National Certification Department

Table 2

Percentage of Respondents Who Endorsed Varying Time Allocations for Three Professional Activities

| | Activity | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Assessment | Consultation | Intervention |
| Percentage Range | Percent | Percent | Percent |
| Actual time allocation (estimated) | | | |
| 0-- 10 | 12 | 20 | 43 |
| 11-- 20 | 8 | 28 | 22 |
| 21-- 30 | 9 | 27 | 16 |
| 31-- 40 | 11 | 12 | 8 |
| 41-- 50 | 19 | 7 | 5 |
| 51-- 60 | 11 | 2 | 2 |
| 61-- 70 | 12 | 1 | 1 |
| 71-- 80 | 10 | 2 | 2 |
| 81-- 90 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| 91--100 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Mode | 50.00 | 20.00 | 10.00 |
| Mdn | 50.00 | 25.00 | 20.00 |
| M | 48.07 | 26.92 | 20.79 |
| SD | 25.35 | 17.56 | 17.48 |

(table continues)

| Percentage Range | Percent | Percent | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ideal time allocation | | | |
| 0-- 10 | 15 | 4 | 10 |
| 11-- 20 | 15 | 14 | 14 |
| 21-- 30 | 30 | 35 | 30 |
| 31-- 40 | 21 | 29 | 27 |
| 41-- 50 | 13 | 12 | 13 |
| 51-- 60 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| 61-- 70 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 71-- 80 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 81-- 90 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 91--100 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Mode | 30.00 | 30.00 | 30.00 |
| Mdn | 30.00 | 30.00 | 30.00 |
| M | 30.75 | 34.07 | 32.43 |
| SD | 15.57 | 14.62 | 15.04 |